

Exploring the Experiential Aspect of Home-Stay in Kampung Lonek Using Diary Method

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ABSTRACT

Home-stay is one of the Malaysian government efforts to diversify its cultural tourism product. Tourists are adopted by their foster families and experience the traditional life in Malay villages. This study explores the experiential aspects of home-stay holidays in Kampung Lonek using diary method. Nineteen diaries were returned and analyzed using NVIVO. The paper proposes a home-stay experiential model which explains the phases of travel experience including the on-site experience. Among the on-site experience dimensions are 'Environmental Experience', 'Activity, Culture and Knowledge Experience' and 'Human Interaction Experience'. The uniqueness of home-stay experience is discussed along with some management implications.

Keywords: Home-Stay, Experience, Diary Method, Malaysia

Introduction

Rural tourism has existed for a long time in Malaysia. However, it has only recently received recognition as a tourism product with the preparation of Malaysia's Rural Tourism Master Plan in 2001. A market survey undertaken for the preparation of the master plan indicated that foreign tourists to Malaysia spent 15% of their overnights in its rural areas. In addition, the study also found that the market profile of foreign visitors to rural Malaysia is balanced, with Britain, Northern Europe, Australia/New Zealand and the United States each representing valuable source markets (United Nation Development Programme, 2003).

One specific form of rural tourism promoted by the Malaysian government is the home-stay program organized by communities in the rural areas throughout the country. With this product, visitors have the opportunities to visit rural villages and attractions and to experience the hosts' culture while the hosts have the opportunities to be a part of the tourism product and to receive the socio-economic benefits from it (Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism, 2001). At present, there are over 142 home-stay programs throughout Malaysia, forming an important tourism product for Malaysia (Fatimah Basiron, 2005). Important foreign markets for the home-stays are tourists from Japan and Korea, while domestic tourists consist mostly of students who are assigned to visit the home-stays as part of their study curriculum as well as participants of training workshops which use the home-stays as the workshop venues (Kayat, 2007).

Rural tourism such as the home-stay is said to be able to bring immediate benefits to both the group that supplies the program and the group that desires the program. A case study of a French Acadian region on an island in eastern Canada undertaken by MacDonald and Jolliffe (2003) indeed revealed that cultural rural tourism in that region provides a potential short and long-term economic tool for rural communities while providing education, entertainment, and enrichment for tourists. Tourist experience is a concept that represents education, entertainment, and enrichment received by the tourists. To date, there is not much site-specific research on tourist experience at the home-stays in Malaysia. The question of 'what is the nature of home-stay experiences' begs to be explored. It has been acknowledged that people differ in their motivations and meanings attached to experiences (Duman & Matilla, 2005). Specifically, the concept of vacation experience as the underpinning notion of tourist satisfaction and its relevance in the business context of tourism from the consumer perspective along with the role of race as an influential factor in vacation experience were of particular interest in the study. The objectives of the study are:

1. To explore the experiential aspect of home-stay among tourists.
2. To develop a home-stay experience model for the study area.

Literature Review

One of the goals in any tourism offering is to maximize the amount of psychological experience for tourists. Tourist experience will determine whether a visit is successful or not (Zakariya, 2006). If the capitalist mode of production produces goods and services, which via the market mechanism become commodities, to be sold, then experience is a new de-materialized commodity that generates increasing returns. The distinction of experience as a separate, valuable commodity offers new perspectives for analysis and strategizing (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003).

Loftman (1991) states that the experiential view of the tourist is a sensory stream of consciousness, the imaginative and affective complexes that accompany a tourist experience. This includes reported thoughts, feelings, expressive behaviour, emotional reactions, imagination, activities, setting, evaluation and stimulation through sensation. Hammit (1980) organizes tourist experience into five phases: travel anticipation, travel to, on-site experience, travel back and recollection. Among research on the concept of tourist experience are: the concept of tourist flow or peak experience (Csikszentmihalyi 1975), tourist mood (Hammit 1980), tourist experience-based management (Manfredo *et al.* 1983), tourist service experience (Otto and Ritchie 1996), museum visitor experience (Beeho and Prentice 1997) and tourist mindfulness model (Moscado 1999).

Experiential quality is an important component of customers' evaluation processes in various service settings (Otto & Ritchie, 1995). They found hedonic factors, novelty and control as important sub-dimensions of the service experience with leisure services. Otto & Ritchie (1995) also proposed that hedonic benefits should be among the main drivers of the perceived satisfaction and value of cruise vacation experiences. Duman & Matilla (2005) found that hedonics or the pleasurable aspects of the consumption experience are strongly linked to perceived value. Creating a consumption experience that is fun, pleasurable and conducive to social interactions is likely to induce positive customer reactions (Duman & Matilla 2005). In an experience-based exchange the tourist enters into a multifaceted interaction with the actors and the setting of a narrative staged by the local community (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003).

A vacation experience consists of three phases as suggested by Craig-Smith and French (1994). While the anticipatory phase is the experience tourists undergo during the time they prepare to travel, the experiential phase includes the experience they get during the journey to and at the destination as well as the experience during the return

journey from the destination. The recollection dimension of the travel takes place during the third phase, which is termed as the reflective phase.

Ahola (2005) conducted a research on the notion of experience in the context of consumer culture theory. Ahola discussed three different frames of experience theorizations used in consumer culture theory: 1) humanistic frame, which explains experience as subjective and inner phenomena, 2) extra-ordinariness frame, which emphasizes newness and 3) social and marketplace frame which explains experience as an artefact produced in the market. On the other hand, Natan (2005) conducted a research on tourist experience and identified four noteworthy conceptual developments in the study of the tourist experience: 1) a turn from differentiation to de-differentiation of everyday life and touristic experiences; 2) a shift from generalizing to pluralizing conceptualizations; 3) a transformed focus from the toured objects to the tourist subjective negotiation of meanings; and 4) a movement from contradictory and decisive statements to relative and complementary interpretations.

The core component in a home-stay program in Malaysia, which actually differentiates a Malaysian home-stay program from a home-stay elsewhere in the world, is the element whereby guests live *with* the home-stay operators whom are usually introduced as adopted families (or 'keluarga angkat' in Malay) throughout their stay. This element involves the guests eating, cooking, and doing many activities together with their adopted families allowing two parties with probably different cultural backgrounds to interact and learn from each other.

Plog (1974)'s discovered the influence of tourists' personality on travel behaviour. The psycho-centric travellers are fearful and less likely to assimilate into a new culture. On the other hand, the allo-centric tourists welcome new experiences. Allo-centrics and culture lust tourists would welcome interactions with residents with culture that is different from themselves more than students who are sent to these home-stays to fulfil the learning objectives of their study program. Not all students are open to immersing themselves in different cultural environments. Akbar *et al.* (2002) who studied students staying in home-stays in Australia conclude from their findings that cultural differences are a significant part of the home-stay experience and that cultural differences may lead to good and bad experience.

There are various methods employed in the study of tourist experience. Among them are in-depth interview (Beeho and Prentice 1997), quantitative structured interview (Manfredo *et al.* 1983), experiential method using beepers (Mannel & Iso-Ahola 1987) and diary method (Markwell and Basche 1998).

Methodology

As stated by Kayat (2007), students are among the main market for home-stay holiday in Malaysia. In September 2007, tourism students from the University of Malaya were invited for a three-day-two-night home-stay holiday in a Malay Village called Kampung Lonek. Twenty-nine of them decided to take this rare opportunity as the holiday was fully funded by the organizer which was a local tourism authority. The authors' aim was to explore the experiential aspect of holiday with the home-stay. Pearce (1988) states that Diary is an excellent research instrument if researchers intend to explore behaviour and experience of tourists in the natural context. Delongis *et al.* (1992) add that the method allows monitoring processes and changes which might occur over the duration of the tour. This enables a deeper understanding of human emotion which leads to increased ecological validity. Markwell and Basche (1998) however alert to the fact that females are more likely to participate in diary writing as compared with males.

A twenty-page diary was given to each of the student. The type of diary used was an unstructured as explained by Corti (1993) and Bryan and Bell (2003). They state that unstructured diary is written spontaneously by the diarist and not at the behest of a researcher. Students were instructed to record their entire holiday experiences from the day they

depart to the day they return to the university. The unstructured diaries write up encouraged participants to write what matters most to them during home-stay holiday.

Upon their return to the university, students were required to re-type the diaries into MSWORD and submit them to the researchers in the form of soft copies. In order to increase the response rate, students were given a financial incentive for three best diaries. Out of twenty-nine students who went for the holiday, seventeen of them completed their diaries and submitted them to the researchers. Content Analysis was carried out using NVIVO in order to explore the patterns in answers and group them into dimensions which are representative for the model of home-stay experience in Kampung Lonek.

Results and Discussion

There were twenty-nine students taking part for the home-stay holiday. Nineteen were female students while ten were male. However, only 17 diaries were submitted to the researchers for analysis, giving a response rate of 58.6%. Referring to Table 1, the majority of diary respondents are female (88.2%) while male respondents constitute only 11.8%. In terms of response rate by gender, female response rate is markedly higher (78.9%) as compared with only 20% male. The scenario duplicates the statement of Markwell and Basche (2003) who recorded a much higher response rate among female ecotourists in Australia. The majority of them (41.2%) are 23 years old, while 29.4% are 21 years old. Those who are 22 and 24 years old represent 23.55% and 5.9% respectively. In terms of race, 58.8% of the participants are Chinese and 41.2% of Malays.

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Demographic Profile	Frequency	Percent
Age		
23	7	41.2
21	5	29.4
22	4	23.5
24	1	5.9
Race		
Chinese	10	58.8
Malay	7	41.2
Gender		
Female	15	88.2
Male	2	11.8

Home-Stay Experience

Using NVIVO, content analysis was carried out guided by the tourist experiential model (Craig-Smith & French 1994), the Leiper Tourism System (Leiper 2004) and the multi-phases of tourism experience (Hammit 1980).

1. Anticipatory Phase

During this phase, both Chinese and Malay participants were nervous by anticipating their home-stay experience. The differences in personality have contributed to the different varieties of anticipation (Plog 1974). The psycho-

centric oriented participants worried about staying with total strangers in a new environment. *"This is the first time I will be staying with people from other race. Actually I felt uncomfortable to stay with unfamiliar people"* (Diary 16: Chinese, Female, 23). They were anxious to meet with their hosts and to see how they could adapt to being adopted by an unknown family. On the other hand, allocentric participants were excited as the holiday would be a new experience and that they had never lived in a village before.

2. Experiential Phase

Experiential phase could be divided into four phases: Travel To, Transit Experience, Destination Experience and Travel Back. During the phase of 'Travel To,' participants were taken to Kampung Lonek by bus. As the air-conditioning system in the bus was not working properly, students loathed the heat and warm weather. The difficult time was eased by the bus driver who shared a lot of jokes during the journey. Some of the Chinese participants killed the time by playing 'Chai Mui' game and chatting with their friends. Two diaries recorded how they slept throughout the journey. As stated by Leiper (2004) in its Tourism System, transit regions play an important role in tourism experience. During this holiday, the bus stopped to rest at Ulu Bendul Recreational Park. Many diaries recorded this experience as a happy respite. Participants took many pictures and bought a lot of food for their continuing journey. The main attraction of the park is the waterfall.

3. Destination Experience

Within Destination Experience, three main dimensions are identified. These are (1) Environmental Experience, (2) Activity, Knowledge and Culture Experience and (3) Human Interaction Experience.

Environmental Experience

The weather was recorded as hot during day time and cold at night. All the participants appreciated the greenery of the paddy field. Ahola's (2005) extraordinary frame (newness) is illustrated by a participant who viewed a paddy field at a close range for the first time in her life. The participants also enjoyed fresh air in the village. *"I'm sitting in the car with widely scrolled down window.... feel the fresh and windy air"* (Diary: 9, Chinese, Male, 21). *"I was going on a motorbike...as the bike accelerated my hair was dancing away and blowing free with the winds"*. (Diary: 5, Malay, Female, 24). The participants were aware of the fact that *"the village is harmonious and far from pollution and noise"* (Diary 1: Malay, Female, 21).

The aspect of newness (Ahola 2005) was also experienced with the uniqueness of 'Minangkabau' architecture in the village. However, a Malay participant expressed her disappointment about the house in the village which is no longer based on traditional concept. The house was renovated and the entire wood based wall had been transformed to bricks. *"I am disappointed because the village concept that I expected in the house does not exist"*. (Diary 17: Malay, Female, 23).

Six participants commented that the village lacks infrastructure as there were no street lights and the road was very dark during night time. *"Motorcycle was the main transportation in the village"* (Diary: 4, Malay, Female, 22). The participants found it difficult to get transportation as not everyone in the village owned a car and they have to depend on other families to take them around. The issue of difficulty in moving around left a participant feeling neglected.

A Chinese participant commented on the smelly house and the unsatisfactory way of disposing the rubbish. *"Maybe its Malay's culture to decorate their floor with carpet, and they do not use vacuum, this cause bad smell in their house and I observed some of them simply throw the rubbish outside the house"*. (Diary 12: Chinese, Female). The bad smell was also recorded from the use of natural fertilizer by the villagers. Some could not sleep. *"I can't sleep on the first night. Maybe it is a new environment and I feel little bit cold"* (Diary 3: Chinese, Male, 23).

Activity, Culture and Knowledge Dimension

Upon arrival everyone was impressed with the unexpected welcoming ceremony displayed by the hosts. Villagers in their traditional *Minangkabau* attire were holding '*Bunga Manggar*' (flowers arranged on a pole). Some played drums and other traditional musical instruments. During the stay, participants were able to enhance their knowledge on the local culture of the '*Buapak*' and '*Adat Perpatih*' culture which they had learned during their school days but which they had never actually observed. "*The Buapak is the head of the community which practised the Adat Perpatih Culture. Adat Perpatih is matriarchal in its system, putting women on a pedestal of priority*" (Diary 1: Malay, Female, 21).

Students participated in several traditional events such as '*Pesta Mengemping*' "*Pesta Berandoi*", "*Mengukur kelapa*" and cooking local dishes with their foster family. "*The Berendoi is an event of welcoming a new born baby. It was an invaluable experience*" (Diary 9: Chinese, Male, 21). They also visited some village industries, a historical attraction called "*Teratak Zaba*" (home of a famous local poet), dragon fruit farms, rubber plantations and handicraft centers.

As stated by Natan (2005) tourism experience could transform everyday life to a touristic experience with utilitarian meaning. During these visits participants had many hands-on experiences such as making plastic flowers, noodles, soy bean drink and bean curd. Some of the participants helped out their foster mothers and sisters in preparing meals and they even learned to cook local dishes. The Chinese participants have learned a great deal about Malay lifestyle. "*I have this opportunity staying with a foster family, knowing the cultural lifestyle of the village people, enjoying varieties of Malay food and cookies and knowing more about Islamic practices*" (Diary 10: Chinese, Female, 22). One of the participants stated that she learned about Malay culture and no longer sees it as something strange. This phenomenon is a perfect example of Natan's (2005) statement that tourism experience could create a movement from contradictory statements to complementary interpretations.

Akbar *et al.* (2002) observed that tourist experience could be unsatisfactory. During their stay, some participants expressed several causes of disappointments; there were disappointments for not being able to visit the handicraft centers and for the unfruitful visit to the dragon fruit farm. Three diarists described their visits to the dragon fruit farm as wasting time because there was no proper interpretation of the visit. One participant disliked the food prepared by her host, stating that "*I only ate a bit for my dinner. It is because I don't like the food prepared*" (Diary: 10, Chinese, Female, 22). There was also a complaint about late dinner. "*We reached home and had our dinner together around 9 something. Having dinner at this hour is considered late and it is not good for digestion*" (Diary 12: Chinese, Female, 22). Other dissatisfaction reflects the psycho-centric nature of participants and their resistance to try new experience during home-stay.

"*My roommate and I were asked to wear 'sarung', eat on the floor and without spoon, and sleep on the floor! Even in the orientation week, we (were) still allowed to eat on the table. The worst thing is my Chinese friends all no need to do so. I wonder why I'm so unlucky*". (Diary 16: Chinese, Female, 23).

Human Interaction Dimension

All the participants felt welcomed by the villagers as they are very friendly especially their foster families. "*It is really a unique experience that we could never find in any hotel at any place! No matter how good the services of a hotel, it will never give you the warm feeling of companionship, the feel of family*" (Diary 16: Chinese, Female, 23). Since the participants were treated as a part of family members, most of them displayed great affection for one another. The bond among them was palpable on the last day. Many participants and their foster families shed their tears during

the departure of the participants from the village. Participants recorded that their foster families invited them over during 'Hari Raya' and they have exchanged their contacts numbers and addresses. They also exchanged souvenirs.

At the beginning of the holiday, six participants wrote of their difficulties in understanding the local dialect. To them the communication was difficult at the beginning. However, as time passed by they began to grasp the language. During the welcoming ceremony the head of the village was addressing them in standard Melayu language. To the participants it was easy to understand. However, they were rather concerned about international tourists who looked bored and possibly could not understand the welcoming speech. The participants recommended that the opening speech should be in English for the benefit of international tourists. These tourists were from France, Egypt, and Japan.

The urge to socialize and knowing others was so strong in one of the Chinese participants. She expressed her disappointment for not getting the chance to stay with foreigners. *"My friend and I decide to stay together and we really want to be staying in the same house with the foreigners. We like to get to know them better, but the organizer had really disappointed us"* (Diary 2: Chinese, Female, 21). A Malay participant was unhappy because she could not stay with her group of friends. The feeling was shared with a Chinese participant who would have preferred to stay with her study group for the purpose of study assignment.

Four of the participants were with the perception that international tourists were not friendly as they preferred to be among themselves. They also complained that the international tourists were not respecting the local culture as the ladies were trying to wear 'songkok' which is meant for men. One of the participants felt rejected by them. *"For me, the foreigners are not very friendly. They prefer to mingle with their own group. It is very hard for us to befriend with them, my friend and I tried to talk to them and they did not welcome us. I wanted to take photo with them but they seem to be unhappy about it"* (Diary 2: Chinese, Female, 21). A participant however recorded a positive interaction with a tourist from Belgium whereby they exchanged knowledge on culture and language. Even though all seventeen participants were from the same university, they were some who did not know about each other. The home-stay holiday provides a captive atmosphere for them to know one another. A participant wrote *"We met before in faculty and took the same course but we never spoke to each other ...but we knew our presence ...and of course sharing the same family actually gives the chance to know one another better"* (Diary 9: Chinese, Male, 21). One of the participants had lost her hand phone during her stay. She had a pleasant surprise when all of her friends (old and new) made a camaraderie effort to search for it.

4. Travel Back

During the period of Travel Back, the air-condition of the bus did not work at all. All the participants felt restless and perspired in hot weather. The ordeal was worsened by intense traffic congestion on their way to the University.

5. Reflective Phase

Upon their return to the university, participants shared their experiences with their roommates and other friends. Some of the participants regarded their experiences in Kampung Lonek as one of the best memories in their lives. Participants bought and were given a lot of souvenirs that could be used as the remembrance of their holiday. Fourteen of the participants recorded their experiences of taking pictures with their foster families, friends, villagers and international tourists. Besides that, all the participants were given away certificates for their participation in the home-stay holiday.

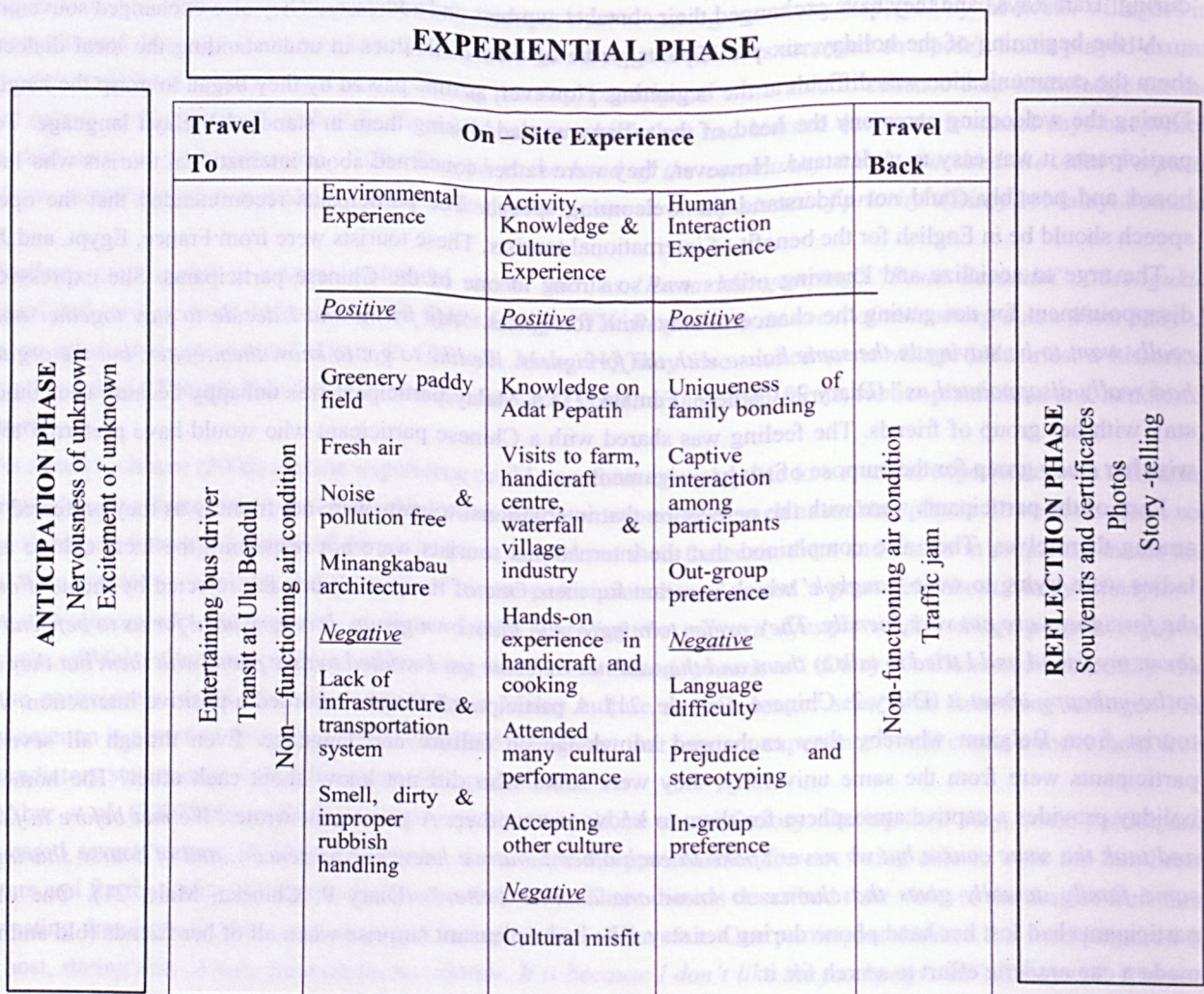


Figure 1: Homestay Experiential Model

Conclusion and Recommendation

Experience is a commodity in the business of the home-stay (Zakariya, 2006), the more the tourists are satisfied with this commodity, the bigger the chances for the home-stay to stay in business. The nature of experiences of home-stay visitors was the focus of the study and the diary method was employed to explore in-depth experiences among home-stay participants in Kampung Lonek. Guided by the tourist experiential model (Craig-Smith & French 1994), the Leiper Tourism System (Leiper 2004) and the multi-phases of tourism experience (Hammit 1980), a Home-stay Experiential Model consisting of five phases of the home-stay experience is developed from the data (Figure 1). The phases are Anticipatory, Travel To, On-site Experience, Travel Back and Recollection. Within the On-site Experience, content analysis revealed three main dimensions. These are Environmental Experience, Activity, Culture and Knowledge Experience and Human Interaction Experience.

During the anticipatory phase the main experience written by the participants is the nervousness and the excitement among participants anticipating the holiday. The differences among them may reflect their different personalities as explained by Plog (1974). During the Travel To as well as the Travel back, the disturbing experience recorded by almost all diarists is the state of the air-conditioning which was not functioning as it should. This experience may have tarnished a part of the entire enjoyment of the holiday. However, the positive attitude of the bus driver and the right use of the transit region might have neutralized the discomfort experiences among participants.

There are both positive and negative Environmental Experiences experienced by the participants at the destination. The positive experience was in the form of greenery, paddy fields, fresh air and pollution and noise free surroundings. Participants also enjoyed the *Minangkabau* architecture. The importance of maintaining this architectural landscape is invaluable to ensure the future attractiveness of Kampung Lonek as a home-stay destination. Negative experience which requires urgent attention by the village home-stay authority are cleanliness and transportation system.

In terms of Activity, Culture and Knowledge Experience, participants have gained a lot from the home-stay holiday. The holiday allowed them to live in a unique *Adat Perpatih* community and Malay culture and practices. They visited many places in the vicinity and attended many traditional events. In some occasions they had the opportunity of hands-on experience in making handicrafts and cooking local dishes. However, there were also occasions of cultural misfits such as eating late, sleeping on the floor and eating without a spoon which affected more perhaps the psycho-centric participants.

Human Interaction Experience displayed the uniqueness of home-stay holidays compared with any other form of holidays. Since participants are adopted by the hosts (foster families) and the selection was done randomly, the interaction between hosts and participants, as well as among participants themselves could be equated to serendipity. The system provided a lot of interesting human interaction recorded in the diaries. Despite the initial language difficulty many diaries recorded strong bonds between hosts and participants, the bond closely equalled to a real family. The captive atmosphere in a home-stay allowed participants to get to know each other. Prejudice and stereotyping revealed among participants who felt rejected in an approach to socialise with international tourists. There is also evidence of stereotyping recorded in one of the diaries on the way of Malays living especially in terms of cleanliness. Some participants displayed the need to be in their own group, while some preferred to be grouped with strangers.

During the recollection period, participants brought back many souvenirs and photos for the remembrance. They were also given certificates for the home-stay holiday. Many regarded the home-stay holiday as one of the best experiences in their lives. In the university, participants shared their wonderful holiday stories with friends.

Findings from the study reveal positive and negative diarists' experiences that may translate to strengths and weaknesses of Kampung Lonek home-stay program which require attention if it wishes to sustain. Several resource management and operational issues need to be addressed. For example, the unique architecture and culture must be carefully managed for the appreciation of future home-stay tourists. There is a need to monitor the cleanliness of the home-stay and to enhance operators' communication skill as to ensure that tourists have a sense of comfort and safety as well as to enable them to educate, entertain, and enrich the tourists, which is said to be the benefits most sought by cultural tourists. Thus, an urgent future study that should be carried out is one that explores and examines visitor satisfaction toward these quality dimensions of Kampung Lonek home-stay program.

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